

March 2001

# Lead Update

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## Rhode Island Lead Poisoning Prevention Month May 2001

The Rhode Island Department of Health's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program started the planning for this year's celebration of "*Lead Poisoning Prevention Month*". A statewide mailing targeting community-based agencies, schools, daycare centers, and the medical community, was sent out in February inviting all groups to submit an "activity form" with their planned event for the month of May, in order to develop a calendar of activities to be distributed statewide. This year the program will launch a *medical provider's education effort*, emphasizing the use of the revised *lead screening guidelines*. Program staff members will visit pediatrician and family practitioner offices to bring them the revised guidelines and new educational materials developed by the program, starting the last week of April. If your agency is interested in participating, please call 222-5943.

## Unprecedented Private/Public Partnership Formed In RI To Screen Children For Lead Poisoning

A remarkable effort to further increase lead screening in RI children initiated over a year ago is now in full implementation. In an unprecedented move, three Managed Care Organizations (MCOs): Blue Chip, Neighborhood Health Plan of RI and United Healthcare, as well as two state agencies: the RI Department of Health (HEALTH) and the RI Department of Human Services (DHS) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have jointly formulated a strategy to improve the quality of lead screening.

The strategy capitalizes on reported data and consists of matching HEALTH lead screening data with MCOs claims data on a quarterly basis to identify unscreened children. Provider-based reports are then prepared and sent to individual practices for intensive follow-up for lead screening. Simultaneously, and as a pilot, children without evidence of preventive health service claims for the first 18 months of life are referred to the HEALTH Family Outreach Program for a home visit.

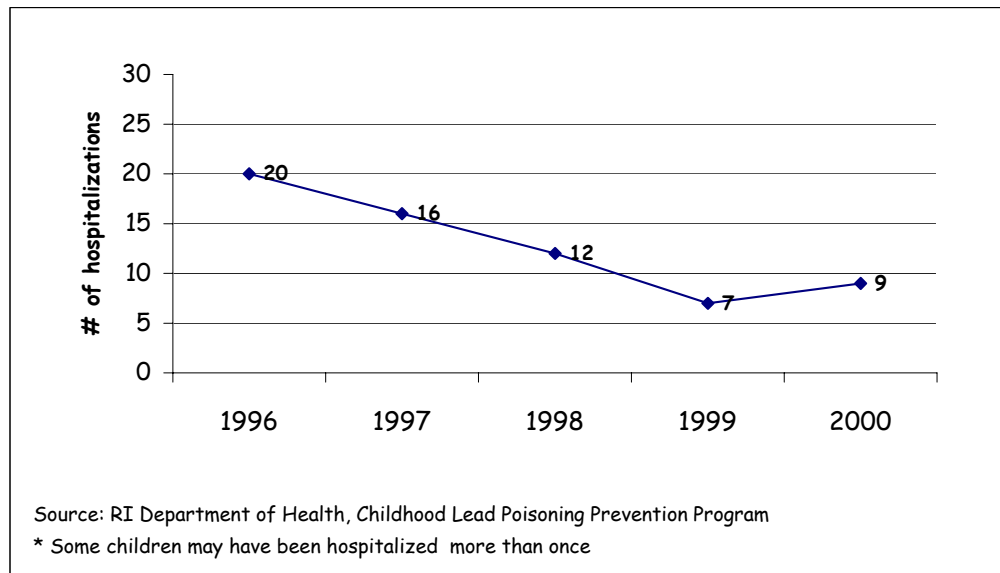
Benefits of strategies such as this public/private partnership are countless. First, data linkages allow collection of data with more complete information than the individual systems. Second, the effort will uncover data quality issues, including lead screenings for which no claims have been submitted, unreported data and other electronic failures in data transfers. Third, an ongoing assessment of the strategy is being done, with concurrent evaluation. Fourth, more children will be screened on a timely manner; and finally and equally important, all fronts united towards the same goal to fulfill the public health responsibility. Aside from probably being the first such effort in the nation, this is a collaborative, cost-effective approach to improve the quality of services for RI children. Providers are invited to provide suggestions as we improve our strategy. For additional questions or comments, please feel free to contact Peter R. Simon, MD, MPH, at 401-222-5928, [peters@doh.state.ri.us](mailto:peters@doh.state.ri.us).

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## Decrease in Hospitalization of Lead Poisoned Children in RI



While lead poisoning continues to be a concern for HEALTH, there has been a significant decrease in the number of hospitalizations due to high levels of lead poisoning in the last five years. As depicted in the graph above, we have seen a drop of more than 50% of hospitalizations, from 20 in 1996, to 9 in year 2000.

A confirmed lead level of equal to or greater than 45 µg/dL is part of the criteria to recommend a hospitalization. However, in some cases hospitalization has been recommended for children with a lead level slightly below 45 µg/dL to prevent the child from returning to an extremely contaminated home environment and therefore preventing further dangerous exposure to lead hazards.

### Enforcement Efforts in Rhode Island

The Environmental Lead Program has been working to improve the response time in referring non-compliant property owners for prosecution. In order to better coordinate the legal enforcement of HEALTH's Notices of Violation regarding properties identified with significant lead hazards, monthly meetings between the Environmental Lead Program, the RI Attorney General's Office and code enforcement in the City of Providence are being held. Providence Housing Court hears lead cases twice a week and cases are also being heard before the Department of Health's adjudication officer.

Since May 1999 greater than 200 cited properties have been referred for prosecution; of these:

- 58 have obtained complete lead safe certification or only soil hazards are pending;
- 18 have obtained lead safe certification for the interior of the dwelling with exterior hazards pending

The remaining properties are in various stages of achieving lead safe certification. Many have engaged in Consent Agreements with HEALTH, maintaining the dwelling unit vacant until compliance is achieved. Several of the property owners have chosen to participate in one of the lead abatement grant programs available in the state.

A constant problem encountered with non-compliant property owners is sale of the property, rather than addressing lead hazards. Often the purchaser has not been disclosed that lead hazards exist and are confronted with unanticipated costs. To combat this problem, the Environmental Lead Program requests that the city or town recorder of deeds place a mark on the deed of the property when a 2<sup>nd</sup> Notice of Violation is issued. As this prevents clear title, it presents an obstacle to transfer of properties with unresolved lead hazards.

Working with the representatives of these offices has allowed for a more proactive and cooperative approach in achieving compliance and a safer housing stock in Rhode Island.